

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003277

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS
PACOM FOR FPS (HUSO)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI POLITICAL UPDATE: CHECKS, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR JAMES F. COLE. REASON 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary. Thailand's bipolar political disorder remained stable Wednesday as caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party pushed to move on to a new election while the political opposition remained focused on using alleged irregularities in the April 2 vote to destroy TRT. Thaksin's caretaker cabinet agreed on May 30 to hold the next election on October 15, which would mean that--for the first time since 2001--candidates would have a short window to switch parties before the vote. Meanwhile, the Criminal Court has agreed to accept an opposition Democrat Party (DP) case accusing the Election Commission of malfeasance. Newspaper headlines, however, focused on new, leaked videotape footage that seems to support DP claims that senior TRT officials colluded with "micro-party" candidates in the April 2 election. The tapes have sent the TRT into heavy spin mode, with at least one opposition newspaper reporting that Thaksin vented his fury over the leaks in yesterday's cabinet meeting. True to form, TRT is now preparing a lawsuit charging the DP with hiring the micro parties to "frame" TRT. This will likely be the last bombshell before the King's anniversary celebration next month forces a political time-out. End Summary.

ELECTION SET FOR OCTOBER 15

2. (SBU) The caretaker cabinet on Tuesday approved the Election Commission's (EC) proposal to hold new House elections on October 15. Given the long lead time until the next vote, and the requirement that candidates be members of their political party for at least 90 days prior to registering for the race, this would be the first "open window" for party switching since the new 90-day rule came into effect in the 2001 vote. That window, however, would close in the next two-three weeks. In the "for what it's worth" category, Deputy TRT leader and caretaker Agriculture Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan told reporters on Tuesday that no TRT members had expressed a desire to leave the party, yet.

CRIMINAL CASE AGAINST EC MOVES AHEAD

3. (SBU) In a boost to opposition efforts to force the controversial EC to resign before any new elections, the Criminal Court announced on May 30 that it will proceed with a court case charging EC members with malfeasance. The case, filed by the Democrat Party, contends that the four EC members broke the law in allowing candidates in the April 2 vote to switch constituencies in the second round of voting on April 23. (Note, a move that was widely seen as beneficial to TRT. End Note.) The trial date has been set for June 19.

SMILE! YOU'RE ON MOD CAMERA

4. (SBU) The cabinet and court's decisions were soon overtaken by the release of photos allegedly showing Defense Minister Thammarak Issarangkul Na Ayyuthaya--who managed the TRT campaign--meeting with leaders of the micro-parties at the Ministry of Defense in March. DP Secretary-General Suthep Thuagsuban provided the images to the Criminal Court as evidence of his claim that TRT paid the smaller parties to run in the April 2, in order to help TRT avoid having to get 20 percent of the votes in single-candidate constituencies.

5. (C) The initial TRT response to these charges was poorly coordinated. MOD Permsec General Sirichai Thunyasiri told reporters on Tuesday that the photos were indeed from MOD cameras and that he was investigating how they were leaked. Following a meeting with Thammarak, Sirichai added that Thammarak denied any knowledge of the footage. Another senior aide to Thammarak told reporters that the micro-party leaders had sought a meeting with the Defense Minister, but were turned down. According to this account, the man resembling Thammarak in the photos is actually his photographer. Deputy TRT spokesman Chatuporn Prompan attempted a separate tack, suggesting that the micro-party leaders had been paid by DP officials to "set-up" Thammarak;

indeed, TRT lawyers have prepared a lawsuit charging the DP with just that. The Nation newspaper--often at the forefront of anti-Thaksin reporting--reported Wednesday that the kerfluffle had prompted the PM to demand Thammarak explain himself in yesterday's cabinet meeting, saying "why is it so obvious? It is damning evidence...how can you come up with a defense?"

COMMENT

16. (C) For the minority of Thai who still have the energy/desire to follow politics, this new "evidence" merely confirms the conventional wisdom that TRT worked with the micro-parties in the April 2 vote. That said, it could form the basis of a stronger case calling for the dissolution of TRT or, at the least, force Thammarak to fall on his sword. Either way, this episode is likely to be the last bombshell before preparations for the King's 60th anniversary in June force politics into a short, but fitful slumber.
BOYCE